

Customer loyalty

Mirroring techniques: Imitation is the sincerest form of service

If you're like most managers, you probably spend a good deal of time teaching reps to listen to customers and then give the right responses. While that's a good first step toward customer satisfaction, it's usually not enough to build customer loyalty.

That's because the key to building customer loyalty often lies in establishing rapport with customers.

So how do you teach your customer service reps to "click" with a wide range of customers? Mirroring techniques can help, according to **Patti Hathaway**, an author and speaker, who is known to her clients as "The Change Agent."

Mirroring is simply copying another person's behavior. For some reps, that's pretty instinctual. For others, it's easier said than done. Here are the main points you'll want to cover when coaching:

Speech patterns

Whether reps work face to face with customers or over the phone, they should pay attention to more than just the words a customer uses.

With mirroring, reps listen for and match voice, tone and tempo. At first

that isn't always easy. "One way to help match the other person's tempo is to match the other person's breathing rate," says Hathaway.

To some extent, those same principles of voice, tone and tempo also hold true for e-mail and chat.

For example, if a customer doesn't use technical jargon in his question, it's probably a good idea for the rep to tailor his response to that customer so it uses less technical language.

Body language

Mirroring body language is particularly effective. Where's the proof? According to Hathaway, researchers have found that words account for 7 percent of a person's message, tone of voice, 38 percent, and gestures or body language, 55 percent.

"That's right, body language accounts for more than half of our message, which makes nonverbal communication a very powerful way to build rapport," says Hathaway.

The first step is to teach reps to match the other person's body movements, posture and gestures. "Of

course, subtlety is everything," says Hathaway. "You may want to wait several seconds before moving. Another important point," continues Hathaway, "is to realize that people only gesture when they speak." The key is to teach reps to make a mental note of those gestures and incorporate them when they respond.

Why it works

Mirroring works because, "basically we like people who are like us," says Hathaway. "Using similar gestures and speech patterns resonates with people on a very instinctual level."

"When reps use mirroring, customers think: 'I like this person. They are just like me.'" says Hathaway. "And, if we like someone, we trust them and want to do business with them. That's what customer loyalty is all about." ■

Source: Patti Hathaway is a certified professional speaker and author. Her most recent book, Untying the 'Nots' of Change Before You're Fit to be Tied, is based on surveying over 1,500 employees. For more information, visit her Web site at www.thechangeagent.com.

Case study

Still not convinced that mirroring will work with customers?



Patti Hathaway

Patti Hathaway, the self-proclaimed Change Agent, teaches the mirroring technique. But even she doesn't always cue into its use until after the fact. Here's a true story:

One of Hathaway's children had surgery. Hathaway paid her insurance premium, but the insurance company delayed payment so long that the insurance company sent the invoice to a

bill collector.

"I was absolutely furious when I called the insurance company," says Hathaway. "I had my 2-minute speech

rehearsed. The rep was smart. He waited until I finished with my complaint. (That's very important.)

"Then he said, 'Mrs. Hathaway, I'm absolutely furious our company has treated you this way.' He matched my feelings and intensity. And do you know what? As soon as I realized that he knew how I felt and that he cared, my anger died down and I was ready to move on to a solution."

But the real surprise, according to Hathaway, is that mirroring is so natural that she didn't realize that the rep had used the technique with her until several weeks later. ■